

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

26TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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HINCHEY AND COLLEAGUES URGE EPA TO STICK TO HUDSON CLEANUP PLAN

ALBANY - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today made public a letter he sent to Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christine Todd Whitman, supporting EPA's plan to remove PCBs from "hotspots" in the Hudson River. The letter was signed by Hinchey and 31 other Members of Congress from New York and New Jersey, including the four U.S. Senators from the two states. Hinchey released the letter today at a press conference in Albany, where he was joined by representatives of Friends of a Clean Hudson, a coalition formed in support of EPA's cleanup plan.

"With the close of the public comment period quickly approaching, my colleagues and I felt it was important to remind Administrator Whitman of our strong support for the EPA's plan," said Hinchey. "We need to do everything we can to combat the flood of propaganda coming from General Electric."

The letter to Whitman conveys the signers' strong support for EPA's cleanup proposal that was released in December 2000. The period for public comment on the proposal concludes on April 17.

"The Hudson River has a singular relationship to our nation's heritage, a central position in our region's social identity, and a tremendous amount of ecological and commercial value," the letter reads. "PCBs from the upper river harm New York and New Jersey's public health, economic growth, environmental quality, and recreational and cultural opportunities along the river. Without remediation, PCBs will continue to adversely affect our society and spread throughout our environment."

The letter was signed by a bipartisan coalition of lawmakers, including the vast majority of those who represent the Hudson River Valley. A copy of the letter is attached, along with a list of cosigners.

April 6, 2001

Administrator Christine Todd Whitman
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1101A, EPA Headquarters
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Whitman:

We would like to convey our strong support for EPA's proposal to remove sediment contaminated by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from the "hot spots" in the upper Hudson River. This clean-up plan is a crucial first step towards restoring the Hudson's tremendous social, ecological, and economic value for the people of New York and New Jersey.

The Hudson River has a singular relationship to our nation's heritage, a central position in our region's social identity, and a tremendous amount of ecological and commercial value. Because of these, and many other important attributes, the Hudson River has been designated as an American Heritage River. Unfortunately, since 1983, 200 miles of the Hudson have also been designated as a Superfund site due to the damage caused by the estimated 1.3 million pounds of PCBs released by General Electric Company.

After more than a decade of scientific investigation and analysis—including considerable governmental scrutiny and an extensive peer review process that provides the foundation for the agency's proposed clean-up plan—EPA has concluded that:

- ◆ PCB-contaminated sediments are not being buried,
- ◆ contaminated sediments are the primary source of PCBs to the rest of the Hudson River,
- ◆ consumption of PCB-contaminated fish poses significant health risks to humans and wildlife and
- ◆ PCBs will not stop adversely affecting public health unless they are physically removed from the river.

EPA estimates that every year five hundred pounds of PCBs flow over the Federal Dam in Troy, NY, dispersing downriver and into the broader environment. PCBs from the upper river harm New York and New Jersey's public health, economic growth, environmental quality, and recreational and cultural opportunities along the river. Without remediation, PCBs will continue to adversely affect our society and spread throughout our environment.

PCBs pose a serious threat to public health; they are probable human carcinogens and are known to cause neurological, reproductive, and endocrine disorders. Since 1976, because of PCB contamination, the New York State Department of Health has advised women of childbearing age and children not to eat any fish from any location along the Hudson. Unfortunately, low-income and subsistence fishermen and their families continue to consume fish contaminated with PCBs. In its Human Health Risk Assessment for the Hudson River, EPA found that regular consumers of Hudson River fish face an estimated increased risk of cancer 1,000 times higher than EPA's goals for protection of public health, and ten times greater than the highest risk allowed under the Superfund law. For non-cancer health effects, regular consumers of contaminated fish also face a risk over 100 times higher than EPA's safety standards.

This contamination also adversely impacts longstanding commercial, recreational, and cultural activities on the Hudson River. For example, the commercial striped bass fishery was once a \$40 million a year industry. However, due to PCB contamination, the state closed the fishery in 1976, all but ending a way of life along the river. Contaminated sediments complicate navigational dredging that is required for commercial craft to use the upper reaches of the river. Additionally, EPA estimates that 50% of the PCBs in the New York Harbor are GE PCBs from the upper river. This has led to significantly increased costs to maintain the New York-New Jersey Harbor as an economically viable port. This contamination also decreases the public's recreational and cultural opportunities and enjoyment of the river.

PCBs also represent a serious threat to environmental quality. PCBs threaten the integrity of numerous aquatic ecosystems and species of wildlife such as bald eagles, tree swallows, minks, snapping turtles and river otters, and adversely affect the reproductive, growth, and survival rates of these and other species of wildlife that live along the river. For instance, a recent study conducted by scientists at the New York Department of Environmental Conservation found hazardous-waste levels of PCBs in snapping turtles from hot-spot areas.

Past clean-ups of contaminated sediments elsewhere have successfully employed environmental dredging to improve the health of aquatic ecosystems by reducing contaminant levels in sediment and fish. Environmental dredging in the Hudson will allow future dredging to ensure commercial craft continue to ply the waters of the upper Hudson River, and reduce the adverse affects of PCBs on the aquatic ecosystem. This means EPA's remediation plan is a critical first step in reducing threats to public health, reviving local economies, reopening recreational opportunities and reinvigorating cultural ties along the river.

We look forward to the Record of Decision in August and working with you to safely remove and dispose of PCB-contaminated sediments.

Sincerely,

(List of signers follows.)

Members of Congress signing letter to EPA Administrator Whitman

New York

Sen. Charles Schumer
Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton
Rep. Gary Ackerman
Rep. Eliot Engel
Rep. Benjamin Gilman
Rep. Maurice Hinchey
Rep. Steve Israel
Rep. Peter King
Rep. Nita Lowey
Rep. Carolyn Maloney
Rep. Carolyn McCarthy
Rep. Michael McNulty
Rep. Gregory Meeks
Rep. Jerrold Nadler
Rep. Major Owens
Rep. Charles Rangel
Rep. Jose Serrano
Rep. Louise McIntosh Slaughter
Rep. Edlophus Towns
Rep. Nydia Velazquez
Rep. Anthony Weiner

New Jersey

Sen. Robert Torricelli
Sen. Jon Corzine
Rep. Robert Andrews
Rep. Mike Ferguson
Rep. Rush Holt
Rep. Robert Menendez
Rep. Frank Pallone
Rep. Bill Pascrell
Rep. Donald Payne
Rep. Steven Rothman
Rep. Chris Smith